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Slow: Towards a decelerated urbanism

Abdul Shaban and Ayona Datta

In June 2015, the CEO of Kochi smart city in India suddenly resigned. This came as a shock to many in the sector, given that the inauguration of the first IT building in Kochi smart city was scheduled in July. As stories began to emerge of a three million GBP corruption racket run by the CEO, rumours also circulated that he had been removed by TECOM Dubai holdings (the investor) once this was established (Praveen 2015). The corruption was related to the purchase and use of inferior quality materials at the price of high-spec building materials quoted in the tenders. As TECOM ordered an immediate audit of its finances in Kochi smart city, high level ministerial committees and the Smart City Council of India rushed to do damage control. An independent Audit report thereafter revealed several inconsistencies in the project, finding that the terms and conditions of the smart city and its claims to the provision of jobs had been diluted.

In itself, this story can be seen as the ‘ordinary’ story of postcolonial urbanism. It highlights the complex web of inconsistencies, ambiguities, corruption, political power games and ‘independent’ investigations that in the end have failed to bring about the transparency, efficiency and formalisation aspired for in postcolonial modernity. Crucially, this ordinary story underlines the perceived ‘slowness’ that often leads to the deceleration and stalling of mega-projects. It is in this context that planning and bureaucracy surrounding the impending urban age is subject to the logics of speed. Speeding up urbanization through tropes like smart cities it is argued will address corruption, bureaucracy, inertia, nepotism, and general unaccountability of those in power that have characterised postcolonial urbanism so far. Slowness here is framed pejoratively, as a stretching of time made possible both by an illegible state and ‘anti-development’ activists working outside the limits of law. Crucially, ‘slowness’ is constructed as a ‘handicap’ of development, modernity and progress. It is

ironical then that smart cities as a national urbanization priority in India claims to break this historical connection between urbanization and its vices, but ultimately succumbs to its forces.

In the introduction to this book, Datta argues for a critical lens of ‘speed, time and duration’ with which the conceptualisation, master planning, production and materialisation of new cities across the global south are to be examined. She calls these ‘fast cities’ since they engage in ‘claimsmaking’ (Lauermann 2015) to urban futures through the imperatives of speed. They combine rhetorics, imagery and ‘futurology’ around a crisis of urbanization, migration and climate change to present speed as a way out of crises. And it is by constructing relative binaries of speed between ‘fast’ and ‘slow’ urbanization paradigms that new cities claim to ‘leapfrog’ into sustainable urban futures. In doing so, Datta argues in the introduction that a critical lens of speed can challenge dominant narratives of neoliberalisation and global gentrification in postcolonial urbanism. Each subsequent chapter’s examination of urbanization in this book critiques the ‘re-emergence of the postcolonial state desirous of distinction, differentiation and disentanglement from the “colonial burden” – a reinvention through new utopian imaginings of the city.’

The smart city Kochi story nevertheless shows how the faultlines of speed are written into its own imperatives. Smart cities in India are the new fast cities introduced with a wave of rhetoric around their urgency and efficiency in the global urban age. Speed however, is the new mode of enunciation of sovereign power, where the “relationship between popular control of government and private control of means of production, distribution and exchange is a fundamental dichotomy in society that tends to play out in favour of business interest” (Davies 2004:27). Speed in this context becomes the imperative often at the cost of rights, justice and democracy as we see in several chapters of this book. Yet speed and accelerated urbanization do not in themselves address the historical relations between power and capital.

Indeed, if anything, the smart city Kochi story suggests that speed now reconfigures historical relations between state bureaucracy and nepotism into new relations of venality between the state and private sector. Yet, several chapters in this book have highlighted that in this transformed relationship, it is grassroots resistance that is often framed as the ‘flipside’ of speed since it contradicts what social and political elites see as their ‘democratic’ rights to capital, mobility and middle-class lifestyles.

On the other hand, it is precisely for the above reasons that socialist or autocratic countries such as China or UAE are seen as progressive by much of the Indian middle-classes when it comes to ‘fast’ development. Indeed, the urgency of responding to repeated crises has evoked a critique in the global south that planning needs to become more responsive and therefore faster and proactive. New cities are now subject to the rhetorics of ‘streamlining’, ‘leapfrogging’, ‘smoothening’, ‘fast tracking’, ‘simplifying’, and several other phrases that imply the suspension of a democratic state and the ascendance of a particularly aggressive form of the entrepreneurial state (Mazzucato 2014). Speed, when prioritised over democracy and citizenship becomes a mode of governmentality, a tool of accumulation by dispossession and of forced displacement. Speed articulates an ‘acquiescent citizenship’ whereby support rather than critique of fast cities becomes the new civic duty of citizens.

Despite the rise of a new state apparatus around speed, there are simultaneous attempts to depoliticise speed. Typically growth coalitions put their case for fast growth as ‘value-free’ at a political level, whilst mobilising local media interests and backing pro-growth politicians and strategies (Houghton 1996; Logan and Molotoch 1987). Emerging political battles along religious, regional, ethnic, caste and class lines in India (Shaban 2010), rampaging civil wars in Africa, Afghanistan and other parts of global south are examples of what fast growth may have contributed to at a global scale. At the core of this new (fast) urbanization lies the primitive accumulation of capital – the assimilation and capture of non-

capitalist means of production into capitalist ones (the eviction, encroachments, and acquisitions are major forms through which the accumulation is accomplished), as an aspect of the formal imposition of 'regimes of accumulation' by the sovereign state. This fast urbanization produces a subsistence-accumulation duality (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011:42), whereby the accumulation economy breaks the subsistence economy to produce structural disadvantages in marginal livelihoods and ways of life. This is most evident now in the 'land wars' waging across several regions of the global south where the interests of urbanization are deflected by peasant articulations of rights to land and livelihoods. New regimes of speed construct the loss of livelihoods as collateral to the 'public' interests of development and economic prosperity. Peasants are now the new frontiers of fast cities and fast urbanization, because their existence is often seen as a threat to speed (Goldman 2012). This legitimisation of the need to remove peasants from what has traditionally been understood as their rightful economic space presents the dialectics of fast cities between urban and rural economies, landscapes and lifestyles and by extension between speed and slowness.

In this book then we have analysed the rhetorics, politics and practices that follow the ideologies and moral imperatives of fast cities. As several chapters have argued, the consequences of producing new cities and urbanization using the rhetorics of 'fast-tracking', 'leapfrogging', and several other memes of speed produces a violence of development that bypasses processes of democratic inclusion and citizenship. However slowing down the process of urbanization does not in itself imply the resurrection of social, spatial and environmental justice. Indeed, much of the legitimisation of fast cities as we have argued in this book follow a model of 'entrepreneurial urbanization' (Datta 2015) that has bypassed local complexities and specificities of capital, governance and citizenship. As Bhattacharya and Sanyal note, "this unhinging of the cities from their regional or national economies

manifests in the dissociation of the new class of workers engaged in immaterial production from regional lifestyles and prevalent social modes of reproduction” (2011:44). They find themselves distant from the terms of engagement with ‘civil society’ where the demand and aspirations of middle class is often articulated (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011:42). This surplus population are then forced in the hugely informalised and segmented labour market, having to negotiate with agents of the state to secure their lives and livelihoods.

Our purpose in this book therefore has been to show that speed, time and duration are essential components of a critical urbanism. This does not imply that new cities that face ‘blockades’ and manifest slower than others are necessarily democratic. We have argued rather for a more careful consideration of time as a way to enrich (rather than bypass) processes of democracy, citizenship, sustainability and belonging in the making of cities. The chapters in this book highlight that while inertia in itself does not embody any inherent guarantees of equality or inclusion, attention to processes of ensuring justice, rights and democracy rather than efficiency might necessarily need to slow down the pace of urbanization.

Decelerated urbanism: A series of provocations

“Government is often characterised as being too slow, but speed should not be a driver in itself. It could be that we need a form of slow government, predicated on a similar idea of slowness that underpins the slow-food movement: valuing craft, provenance, attention to detail, shared responsibility, while creating a platform for dialogue and community through human-centredness. The fast “push-button democracy” might well be the last thing we need” (Hill 2012).

In light of massive structural shifts across the global south, we need to take heed of Hill’s (2012) statement above. Hill captures the challenges of growing ‘too fast’ by suggesting that ‘speed’ as a model of urbanization sacrifices the democratic processes that are usually relatively slow given their attention to the processes of consultation, deliberation and

planning. It is in this context that we argue for a decelerated urbanism in order to engage with processes of democracy and citizenship in planning and governance.

But what are the alternative development regimes that produce just and democratic futures? Almost 20 years ago, Imbroscio (1998) outlined six elements of an alternative urban development regime. These are strategies to (i) increase human capital, (ii) increase community economic stability (iii) proper accounting of development costs and benefits through public balance sheets, (iv) the development of asset specificity, (v) economic localism, and (vi) development of alternative institutions. Imbroscio's paradigm of local economic development are still relevant to urban America's problems. But in the context of the global south, his call to cities to adopt strategies of entrepreneurial mercantilism, community-based economic development and municipal enterprise does not capture the entrepreneurial capacity of the state-private sector alliance. They also do not respond to the increasing transformation of state-citizen relations and therefore of the nature of citizenship in the global south.

In the rest of this final concluding chapter we engage in a series of provocations that imagine a multiplicity of different urban futures to that currently enacted across the global south. In provocation #1, we propose slow and 'sensory' urbanism for ushering new possibilities of urban citizenship, community and spatial justice. We propose that attention to the rhythms of everyday life in cities through sensory and embodied engagement with urbanization will produce more equitable distribution of power and resources among the grassroots. Provocation #2 emphasizes on slow governance leading to more humane, differentiated, deliberative, participative and contextualized form of urbanism rather than a 'push-button' democracy. We propose that a transition to slow policy and governance might hold the key to urban futures which are in the long term resilient to future crises. In provocation #3, we argue for the need for democratization of common to stop 'land wars'

which the entrepreneurial state is ushering in Global South. We propose that the decommodification of land and the notion of territorial commons is key to an articulation of a decelerated urbanisation. Here current urbanization paradigms need to consider the materialities of social and spatial justice that are embodied in claims to land and livelihoods. Finally, in provocation #4, we call for alternative grassroots utopias that can mobilise and materialise what Lefebvre call the ‘impossible possible’ in future urbanization paradigms.

Provocation #1: Slow urbanism

Our first provocation is to produce and counter the praxis of fast urbanism. Removing the prerogative of speed in the management and implementation of urbanization projects opens up new possibilities for urban citizenship. This is not to establish binaries or moral positioning between slow and fast cities; rather to radically reorganise the notion of time, speed and duration in finding local approaches to design and urban planning. Such attention cannot be paid through acquiescence with the entrepreneurial agenda of the state; rather through a dialectical relationship between the language and performance of rights and the terms and conditions of citizenship imposed by the entrepreneurial state.

We draw here upon a range of ‘slow’ movements that emphasise the local, sensory and embodied nature of urbanism. One of these, the slow food movement is an international NGO that focuses on the sensory and embodied qualities of food as an alternative to globalised fast food systems. It emerged in 1986 and was initiated by an Italian Food writer who got alarmed by the opening of McDonald’s restaurant next to the Piazza di Spagna in Rome. This movement was started to keep local community economies vital. The movement’s aim was to protect the ‘rights to taste’ by protecting traditional food products, promoting pleasure of eating (including social sharing of meal) and promoting traditional agricultural methods and techniques, among other initiatives (Mayer and Knox 2006).

Akin to the slow food movement, 'slow cities' or Cittaslow is also an alternative movement promoting local sustainability claims to address larger concerns of spatial justice in cities and regions. Cittaslow draws inspiration from the slow food movement and positions itself explicitly against the “corporate-centred/mainstream economic development policies” (Mayer and Knox: 2006: 322) arguing against the speed and homogenising qualities of globalisation that reproduce a specific template of neoliberal urbanism across the world. It aims for “creation of a progressive network of small towns – Slow Cities or Citta Lente – that set out to follow an alternative urban development agenda. It was established in 1999 by the Mayor of four Italian towns (Greve in Chianti, Bra, Orvieto and Positano) and president of Slow Food (Lowry 2011). Cittaslow has 54 certification criteria of which 24 are compulsory. These criteria relate to the six spheres, namely, (i) environmental policies, (ii) infrastructure policies, (iii) technologies and facilities for environmental quality, (iv) safeguarding autochthonous production, (v) hospitality, and (vi) awareness (Lowry 2011: 3). In order to be certified by Cittaslow, a city must also have a population 50,000 or less, which implies that the potential for transformation lies in small and medium towns. There are now a total of 141 certified Cittaslow in 23 countries in 2011 by Cittaslow international (2011). Although all of these cities are in Europe their policies to incorporate slowness and conviviality in urban life can be translated in a diversity of regional and local contexts.

As Pink (2008, 106) notes, the principles of Cittaslow ‘engage their participants sensorially rather than simply economically, intellectually or emotionally.’ Pink further notes that a ‘sensory approach to urbanism can produce insights that contribute, alongside conventional methodologies, to our understandings of human engagements in sustainable urban development processes.’ Cittaslow emphasises local economic strengths that contributes to equality and community mobility. Mayer and Knox further argue, “Slow cities are places where citizens and local leaders pay attention to local history and utilize the

distinctive local context to develop in better and more sustainable ways” (2006: 322). But Cittaslow, like several other movements around local sustainability is not without its weaknesses. Its localisation of policy and governance embodies inherent assumptions that has been subject of continued debate in recent urban studies scholarship. The assumption that the local is somehow more equal and equitable than the regional or national assumes that networks and structures of power and capital do not work within and across local communities. It also assumes that devolution of political power to the ‘local’ (including urban local bodies and local authorities) encouraged by international development agencies in global south countries will automatically ensure equitable distribution of capital and resources and decision-making across socially and economically marginalised groups. While several countries in the global south have initiated policies of Agenda 21 to decentralise and localise decision-making powers, the emphasis on localism often assumes that greater freedom or ‘spatial liberalism’ (Clarke and Cochrane 2014) will promote innovation and greater engagement among civil society. In countries such as India and China, this localism has instead consolidated the power of local elites and middle classes while further excluding the marginalised to the peripheries. Moreover, as many of the chapters in this book point out, localism can itself become a form of ‘statecraft’ whereby power, inclusion and participation in local decision-making is mediated and controlled by the state.

A slow urbanism in the global south would move beyond a mere recognition of local history and contexts in the manner advocated by Cittaslow or other ‘slow’ movements to a historiography of social inequalities, accumulation, dispossession and exclusion. Slow urbanism would articulate an attention to the prosaic transactions of everyday life in cities, to emotions, feelings and experiences of those who inhabit the city, of those who are directly affected by the economic imperatives of urbanization and fast paced growth. This means a thick description of the ways in which social inequalities have been historically connected to

urban development, a critical analysis of the contexts in which these social inequalities have been understood through linear time, and a study of the ways in which the notion of cyclical time has been devalued in critical urban geography often to the detriment of subaltern marginalised groups. In short, slow urbanism will not just acknowledge the spatio-temporal cycle of inequalities and exclusions, but will engage, debate and seek to address these repeatedly during the cycles of urbanization.

What would a slow urbanism look like? At the first instance it would take heed of cyclical time. In the introduction to this volume, Datta draws upon Lefebvre's notion of *rhythmanalysis*, which "concerns the everyday, rites, ceremonies, fetes, rules and laws, there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into repetitive difference" (Lefebvre 2004: 6). This is fundamentally in opposition to the shaping of fast cities through the marking of linear time in global urban crises of migration, urbanization and climate change. Slow urbanism takes heed of what Lefebvre notes as "the lived, the carnal, the body" (2004: 9) in processes and policies of urbanization and would lay the foundations of future urbanization on social justice and citizenship. Lefebvre notes, "we know that a rhythm is slow or lively only in relation to other rhythms (often our own: those of our walking, our breathing, our heart) (Lefebvre 2004: 10). We can make these carceral rhythms feature in urbanization by considering how the body occupies the processes and practices of urbanization, not just in being present in new cities, but also by being rendered invisible by fast urbanism. We can further examine the dialectical relation between the notion of linear time in the fast construction of new cities and the notion of cyclical time in the ghost cities left behind after the construction boom. Slow urbanism would allow for a more nuanced connection between the rhythms of global urban crises, economic downturns and migration explosion and the cyclical time of exclusions, dispossessions and expulsions. A slow

urbanism would prioritise the time needed in the making of ordinary cities rather than the speed of making fast cities.

Provocation #2: Slow governance

Our critique of fast cities in this book has sought to argue that speed embodies the logics of capital accumulation and growth, which are engaged in the governance of ‘population’ rather than the advancement of diverse citizenships. This fast urbanism is promoted through the assumption that speed (aka efficiency) can achieve ‘good governance’.

Fast cities are a ‘gold rush’ for the ‘experts (Bhatia 2016) which has led not only to North-South transfer of models of urban governmentality but also increasingly to South-South collaborations and partnerships between nation states and urban municipalities. All the cities studied in this volume have significant involvement of experts such as IT consultants, architects, planners, state officials in the North and South who are continuously looking for avenues to further their growth through consultancy, providing expert advice and exporting their men and technologies to market new ‘governance models’ in the global south. This fast governance market assumes uniform conditions of economy, ecology, polity and social behaviours. A good example of this is the recent national urbanization drive in India to create 100 smart cities which has become an archetype of ‘fast policies’ for ‘fast cities’, which advocate information technology driven solutions to all problems from traffic, security to e-governance.

In this drive, fast governance through different forms of communication systems, new media technologies and ICT have become a euphemism for democratic participation and citizenship. The faster the channels of governance, it is argued, the more efficient and transparent the system of governance. To this end, we have seen in this volume how nation states have begun to radically change the terms and conditions of citizenship, territorial belonging and democratic participation through rule of law and judiciary. Efficiency is now a

cul-de-sac of governance where often, the curation of facebook likes, shares and twitter retweets, or what Dan Hill calls 'push-button' democracy has begun to stand for deliberative and participatory models of governance. Indeed in China, India and other global south countries, citizenship has increasingly begun to mean compliance and participation in state entrepreneurial models of policy and governance.

It is not surprising then that fast governance remains geared towards restricting dissent, since dissent inherently 'slows' down its pace. This extends to areas of public disclosure law, right to information, community participation in planning processes, and land acquisition as shown in several chapters of this book. Yet exclusion, polarization (economic and political), disarticulation (Banerjee-Guha 2009:106) and 'protestations' remain major characteristics of mega-urbanization and city making in the global south today. The present paradigm of fast policy led by a global neoliberalism garners increasing support from the middle classes, weakening grassroots movement and often perpetuates plutocracy and majoritarianism in the name of democracy (CASUMM 2006). The poor are reduced to 'vote banks', and their interests are pejoratively interpreted. This in turn creates "shareholder democracy" (Durlington 2011:209) through industrial, house-owners and shareowners association enjoying the 'club good' benefits (Atkinson and Blandy 2006) that fundamentally violate basic (social) democratic principles. While technology governance is now an integral part of state governance, its claims to accelerated results and efficiency is highly overstated and misleading. Indeed, fast governance has begun to stand for a governance by exception.

It is in this context that we need an alternative and radically different model of slow governance. Slow governance should not be misinterpreted as a return to the model of nepotism and micro bureaucracy; rather as a considerable slowing down of the speed of urbanization that will provide opportunities to apply 'slow thinking' (Kahneman 2002) and reasoned approach to the contexts. Slow governance would allow for innovation and

entrepreneurialism in ways that enrich rather than erase the potentialities of a variety of citizenship practices and performances. But it would do this without the need for embedding citizenship within the spaces of corporate run e-governance sites such as those owned by facebook, google or twitter. It would instead enrich and encourage a diversity of citizenships from the intimate to the global across various spaces and times. We elaborate further on this in the next section.

Provocation #3: Democratize the commons

There is a side to the ‘speed’ with which urbanization has been conceived and executed in the global south that has not yet been explicitly connected to the land question. Examining the ‘land wars’ between the private investors and farmers in India, Levien (2012: 8) notes that the Indian state appears to be caught between the land requirements of its liberalized growth model and the exigencies of electoral democracy. This observation is significant since the Indian government as a representative democracy is elected by a population that is still largely rural and yet is driven by the aspirations of a rising urban middle classes which desire increased global investment into its cities and regions in order to benefit from its prosperity. It is therefore stuck in a conundrum – while its grandiose plans of attracting investment to speed up urbanization regularly collides with the more prosaic realities of making land available for this investment to materialise.

One of the key aspects of a decelerating urbanism and slow governance would be to overturn the notion that land as a form of livelihood or commons can only become productive if converted to real-estate. In other words, the fairy-tale of fast urbanization makes us believe that development can only occur when governance of land is tied to urbanization. In countries such as India and China, the real estate sector remains the highest growing sector, where the capital from other sectors are invested due to high speculative returns. The speculation, monetization and marketization of land requires property rights which is often acquired from

peasants at cheap rate or transferred by governments to individuals by acquiring commons or public land. As Schindler (2015) has suggested, countries in the global south now are more interested in the governance of territories through which they aim to govern populations. In a country like India, land acquisition by the state and corporate sector in the last two decades or so have emerged as the priority of national development policy. It is assumed that land transfer to global enterprises by the entrepreneurial state will create significant benefits to the people and aid to the economic growth. Studies have shown that neither urban centres nor the industrial sector for which major chunk of land have been acquired have helped in trickling down the benefits or creating employment for the people (Bhattacharya and Sakthivel 2004). In fact, land acquisition policy has created new forms of inequality that have changed the basic security system of farmers, tribals and other land dependent communities. In the scheme of cities as business models, the strategy of public land acquisition has largely been of a transfer of wealth from poorer sections to the corporates and real estate developers.

The experience in several countries as evident from the papers in this volume suggest that the urbanization question is really a land question. As Shin shows in his chapter, the building of Songdo city of South Korea is based on the promise of real estate realization. In fact, Songdo City has seen the first foreign ownership of Korean soil where a parcel of reclaimed land was sold to a joint venture whose majority share was held by a US real estate developer. Thus while urbanization might be measured in economic growth rates, its continuous demand for land as cheap raw material highlights the terrain of governmentality beyond the normative questions of technical implementation and efficiency.

What would cities look like if real estate was not seen as an indicator of growth under neoliberal urbanism? Would land still hold the same value for urbanization? Would land still need to be violently ‘tamed’ to serve the purposes of capital?

Sampat (2015) argues for ‘a legal framework for land- and resource-use that is locally determined, egalitarian and ecologically appropriate as a tool towards ushering a fundamental reconstitution from below.’ Democratizing the urban and rural land as commons will provide the opportunity to grassroots and marginalized communities to produce a slow economy that will be more sustainable in the long term. This includes both a legal framework for democratization that will not criminalize dissent and rights claims, and also a cultural transformation in the understanding of private property. Models of such democratization already exist in the form of Commons Property Management (CPR) more recently and the ‘Bhoodan’ (land gift) and ‘Gramdan’ (village gift) movements in early 20th century India. These are also present in the form of Community Land Trusts in USA. These models themselves are not without their challenges, but it is worth discussing them briefly to explore their potential in achieving democratic resource use.

Bhoodan and Gramdan movements in India emerged as a Gandhian ideology of ‘sarvodaya’ (or development for all). Under this movement, the gifting of land (bhoodan) was seen as a non-violent process of land distribution to those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Bhoodan was prevalent in India in the 1950-1960s and land transfers under this model were legalized by the state. It was also a socialist experiment based on the activism of prominent Gandhian ideologue Vinobha Bhave and in that sense was directed towards social justice and grassroots democracy. Gramdan followed in the years after Bhoodan where land from the entire village was handed over to the village community making every villager a stakeholder in the common property. The produce and earnings from the land was also shared collectively to benefit all villagers. Land could not be sold or acquired without permission from the village council. Although these two movements had several weaknesses (related to record of land distribution and failure to transform historical social power) and faced several challenges in implementation (corruption, take up and commitment from the collective) at

larger scales, their ideology was translated and institutionalized in the USA as community land trusts. Community Land Trusts (CLT) which continue to this day are non-profit organizations which maintain collective access to land, property, housing and so on for communities in order to provide affordable, equitable and sustainable access to resources.

What shape and form could such institutions of democratic commoning take in the global urban age? What future do these institutions have in a global neoliberal economy that drives fast urbanism in the global south? On the one hand, if these institutions work to their potential, they will provide blockades to the velocity of contemporary global urbanism. On the other hand, we cannot have a return of the same institutions given that the social, cultural, legal and political contexts in which they arose are now transformed. The postcolonial nation-state, in its role as neoliberal entrepreneur needs now more than ever before 'to unlock land values' in order to maintain its sovereignty and rule over territories. This 'need' however is sugar-coated in the language of public prosperity, of growth and development. Indeed recent institutions such as the Gramsabha (village council) in India have often worked as collaborators of private capital to the detriment of landless farmers. Using their powers, the gramsabha has tended to prioritize capital accumulation by sanctioning landuse change from agricultural to industrial purposes. This has shifted power and resources further into the hands of the landholding families, while dispossessing landless farmers. The reverse is seen in the Chinese Hukou system, where national household registers fixing populations to territories restrict rural migrants from accessing benefits in the urban commons. While they work and live in urban areas, they are unable to access affordable housing or bring their families to stay with them in the city.

We still do not have all the necessary tools to understand the complexities and consequences of democratizing the commons. But what is clear is that any gesture in this direction will need to be backed up by strong policy and implementation. This necessarily

means slower processes of collectivization and activism to agree and demarcate commons property around resources such as land, waterbodies or forests. This also means finding alternatives for growth that are not rooted in the need for manipulating territory. It means finding new ways of urbanizing, new ways of governing and new ways of deliberating upon the encroachment from fast cities onto the commons.

Provocation #4: Alternative utopias

‘in order to extend the possible, it is necessary to proclaim and desire the impossible. Action and strategy consist in making possible tomorrow what is impossible today.’ Henri Lefebvre (1976, 36)

The above provocation by Lefebvre is counter to the current urbanization model. Each of our provocations above follow this countercurrent by demanding a radical reorganisation of the very structures of the state and neoliberal urbanization. We hope to have shown that these are viable imaginations of more just futures, indeed of possible futures. The examples that we have used certainly suggest that the impossible can be made possible as long as we are able to imagine these. Indeed urban utopias are subjective. In other words, what seems impossible to some might be mundane and everyday to others.

In his work of creative non-fiction, Darran Anderson (2015) notes in *Imaginary Cities* that a successful utopia will be a plurality. Moving away from the corporate driven imagination of utopia (in the form of big data, smart cities and Internet of Things) Darran notes that what was understood as utopia in the past are already here for many urban citizens in the form of piped water, electricity, jet planes, global communications and so on. The future and therefore utopian futures were all once utopian. When utopias are made possible, they become invisible, but they also exist in fragments. Crucially, he notes that it is only when they are taken away that we realise the utopian aspect of cities. He suggests that we need to define utopias in advance, to locate where the impossible possible does exist, to highlight them and critically emulate them elsewhere. It is only in rethinking how we

understand the past and the future that we can imagine a possible utopian future that is radical and socially just.

Anderson's (2015) notion of utopia presents several important questions. Where does the future begin and end when we are talking about utopias? Clearly if utopias are subjective, fragmented and spatio-temporal, then our notions of utopia need to change across time, and most importantly our assumptions of utopian impossibility needs rethinking. How does the notion of time wrapped up in the future reconstitute our very ideas of utopian thinking? How do we spatialize time, speed and duration when we imagine possible utopian futures?

In the introduction to this book, Datta noted that speed is the new urban utopia. This notion of utopia refers to the forms of thinking that produced architectures and built environments of grandiose claims in the modernist period. This form of utopian thinking has received several elegies to their 'paradoxical call to order, an atavistic alliance with modernist dreams of total environmental control' (Martin 2010, 1). Indeed failed modernist utopias can be seen as the collective failure of the state and of the built environment professions of architecture and planning. The new utopias of fast cities now present new collective imaginations of state and corporate sector alliances. Social order in these new utopias is now largely vested in and through ICT architectures, where digitally directed planning and urban life is the imagination of the future. Digital communications, big data and Internet of Things are now ways to speed up fragmentary and uneven access to a previously unimagined future of ubiquitous connectivity.

In this context of a neoliberal capture of utopian thought and praxis, what other alternative utopias can be imagined? How can utopian thinking move beyond the representation of efficiency, immediacy, convenience, and ubiquity (Johnson 2013; Anttiroiko 2013; Hollands 2008) to political stakes in rights, justice and citizenship? David Harvey (2000) in his book *Spaces of Hope* provides several provocations to think about more

hopeful urban futures. He argues that the purpose of utopia is not to 'provide a blueprint for some future but to hold up for inspection the ridiculous foolishness and waste of the times, to insist that things could and must be better' (1998, 281). He advocates a 'dialectical utopianism' (240) which means a radical project where the rule making nature of communities can confront the rule breaking nature of insurgent politics. For Harvey (2000), this dialectical utopia is not just spatial or temporal. Rather it is 'spatio-temporal', which means it requires the continuous rearrangement of the nature and purpose of imagined politics in different spaces, places and times. This involves experimentation with different material forms of utopian imaginations, 'to explore the wide range of human potentialities' (77) that must materialise in order to provide radical alternatives to authority and power. Where does that leave the possibilities of slow urbanism in the global south?

In our final provocation we call for a utopian imagination of the 'impossible possible' (Lefebvre 1976) to emerge. This utopia emerges from outside the trappings of a global neoliberal urbanism or a postcolonial entrepreneurial state which have so far captured the rhetorics and practices of alternative urban futures. Its utopian praxis is reimagined as a radical alternative to the violence of speed as a logics of social order and control. This form of utopia imagines not just radically alternative urban futures but also radically alternative citizenships that are not held hostage to neoliberal compliance.

Pinder (2005) calls this critical utopianism. For Pinder this is a 'partisan of possibilities' which needs to break away traditional top down 'abstract ideals and formal plans' (245) of blueprint utopias. It follows claims of Marxist scholars such as Lefebvre and Harvey in arguing that utopianism is a prerequisite for the imagination of emancipatory futures. Closing down or rejection of utopianism based on its historical attempts at concretising totalitarian social order is a closing down on debates on the possibilities of changes in social and political life. Following Lefebvre and Harvey, Pinder notes that a

critical utopianism recognises diversity of human experience and raises questions on the role of power in the making of cities and citizenships. Thus utopian thought and action are processes continually in the making and imagining of just urban futures by calling for a transformation of everyday life along the lines of justice, rights and equity. It also means that utopian thought can reveal the inherent injustices, repressions and violence embodied by the urbanization of the state and citizenship even as it seeks to explore and imagine new possibilities and alternatives.

Such a critical utopianism is inherently 'slow'. It also ideologically opposed to the traditional format of utopian social engineering through built environment. This utopianism is dialectic and spatio-temporal and therefore directly relevant to the possibilities of a postcolonial critical urbanism. It is iterative and fluid which is informed by critical reflection on spaces, bodies and power. It sees the possibility of emancipatory futures only the continual imagination of alternatives to fast urbanization. Slow urbanism is a radical alternative utopia which aims to make the impossible possible, while resisting the idea that slow cities are the final outcome of critical utopianism. Slow urbanism is an embodied politics at several scales which conceives of a future that is open to impossible possibilities. As Doreen Massey would say, 'only if we conceive of the future as open can we seriously accept or engage in any genuine notion of politics. Only if the future is open is there any ground for a politics which can make a difference.' (Massey 2005, 11)

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